

"Feeble, en fettered creatures destined solely for our pleasures, I trust you have not deluded yourselves into supposing that the equally absolute and ridiculous ascendancy given you in the outside world would be accorded you in this place; a thousand times more subjugated than would be slaves, you must expect naught but humiliation, and

obedience is that one virtue whose use I recommend to you: it and no other befits your present state. Above all, do not take it into your heads to rely in the least upon your charms; we are utterly indifferent to those snares and, you may depend on it, such bait will fail with us. Ceaselessly bear in mind that we will make use of you all, but that not a single one of you need beguile herself into imagining that she is able to inspire any feeling of pity in us. Roused in fury against the altars that have been able to snatch from us some few grains of incense, our pride and our libertinage shatter them as soon as the illusion has satisfied our senses, and contempt almost always followed by hatred instantly assumes the pre-eminence hitherto occupied by our imagination. What, furthermore, might you offer that we do not know by heart already? what will you tender us that we shall not grind beneath our heels, often at the very moment delirium transports us?

"Useless to conceal it from you: your service will be arduous, it will be painful and rigorous, and the slightest delinquencies will be requited immediately with corporal and afflicting punishments; hence, I must recommend to you prompt exactness, submissiveness, and a total self-abnegation that you be enabled to heed naught but our desires; let them be your only laws, fly to do their bidding, anticipate them, cause them to be born. Not that you have much to gain by this conduct, but simply because, by not observing it, you will have a great deal to lose.

"Give a thought to your circumstances, think what you are, what we are, and may these reflections cause you to quake -- you are beyond the borders of France in the depths of an uninhabitable forest, high amongst naked mountains; the paths that brought you here were destroyed behind you as you advanced along them. You are enclosed in an impregnable citadel; no one on earth knows you are here; you are beyond the reach of your friends, of your kin: insofar as the world is concerned, you are already dead, and if yet you breathe, 'tis by our pleasure, and for it only. And what are the persons to whom you are now subordinated? Beings of a profound and recognized criminality, who have no god but their lubricity, no laws but their depravity, no

care but for their debauch, godless, unprincipled, unbelieving profligates, of whom the least criminal is soiled by more infamies than you could number, and in whose eyes the life of a woman -- what do I say, the life of a woman? the lives of all women who dwell on the face of the earth,

are as insignificant as the crushing of a fly. There will, doubtless, be few you, without the flutter of an eyelash lend yourselves to them all, and faced with whatever it may be, show patience, submission, and courage. If unhappily, some amongst you succumb to our passions' intemperance, let her adjust bravely to her fate: we are not going to exist forever in this world, and the most fortunate thing that can befall a woman is to die young. Our ordinances have been read to you: they are very wise and well-designed for your safety and for our pleasures; obey them blindly, and expect the worst from us should we be irritated by your misbehavior. Several amongst you have ties with us, I know, and perhaps they embolden you, and perhaps you hope for indulgence on this account; you would be most gravely mistaken were you to put much store by them: no blood attachment is sacred in the view of people like ourselves, and the more they seem so to you, the more their rupture will stimulate the perversity in our spirits. Daughters, wives, it is to you, then, I address myself at present: expect us to grant you no prerogative, you are herewith advised that you will be treated with an even greater severity than the others, and that specifically to point out to you with what scorn we view the bonds whereby you perhaps think us constrained.

"Moreover, do not simply wait for us to specify the orders we would have you execute: a gesture, a glance, often simply one of our internal

feelings will announce our desire, and you will be as harshly punished for not having divined it as you would be were you, after having been notified, to ignore that desire or flout it. It is up to you to interpret our movements, our glances, our gestures, to interpret our expressions, and above all not to be mistaken as to our desires. Let us suppose, for example, this desire were to see a particular part of your body and that, through clumsiness, you were to exhibit some other -- you appreciate to what extent such contempt would be upsetting to our imaginations, and you are aware of all that one risks by chilling the mind of a libertine who, let us presume, is expecting an ass for his discharge, and to whom some fool presents a cunt.

"By and large, offer your fronts very little to our sight; remember that this loathsome part, which only the alienation of her wits could have

permitted Nature to create, is always the one we find most repugnant. And relative to your ass itself, there are precautions to observe: not only

would you be well-advised, upon presenting it, to hide the odious lair which accompanies it, but it behooves you to avoid the display, at certain moments, of an ass in that certain state wherein other folk desire always to find it; you probably understand me; and furthermore, the four duennas will furnish you later on with instructions which will complete the explanation of everything.

"In short: shudder, tremble, anticipate, obey -- and with all that, if you are not very fortunate, perhaps you will not be completely miserable. No intrigues amongst you, no alliances, none of that ridiculous friendship between the girls which, by softening the heart in one sense, in another renders it both more ill-tempered and less well-disposed to the one and simple humiliation to which you are fated by us; consider that it is not at all as human beings we behold you, but exclusively as animals one feeds in return for their services, and which one withers with blows when they refuse to be put to use.

"You have seen with what stringency you are forbidden anything resembling any act of religion whatsoever. I warn you: few crimes will be more severely punished than this one. It is only too well known that in your midst there are yet a few fools unable to bring themselves to abjure this infamous God and abhor his worship; I would have you know that these imbeciles will be scrupulously examined, and there is no extremity they will not suffer who are so unlucky as to be taken in the act. Let them be persuaded, these stupid

creatures, let them henceforth be convinced that in all the world there are not twenty persons today who cling to this mad notion of God's existence, and that the religion he invokes is nothing but a fable ludicrously invented by cheats and impostors, whose interest in deceiving us is only too clear at the present time. In fine, decide for yourselves: were there a God and were this God to have any power, would he permit the virtue which honors him, and which you profess, to be sacrificed to vice and libertinage as it is going to be? Would this all-powerful God permit a feeble creature like myself, who would, face to face with him, be as a mite in the eyes of an elephant, would he, I say, permit this feeble creature to insult him, to flout him, to defy him, to challenge him, to offend him as I do, wantonly at my own sweet will, at every instant of the day?.